

A review on the importance of self-compassion for nurses

 Yıldız Öztürk

Department of Pediatric Nursing, Health Sciences Institute, Kırşehir Ahi Evran University, Kırşehir, Türkiye

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ABSTRACT

Self-compassion refers to the development of an understanding and supportive attitude towards oneself. Since the nursing profession requires intense emotional labor and physical effort, self-compassion plays a critical role in increasing the professional resilience of nurses. Nurses with high levels of self-compassion can improve their professional quality of life by reducing the risk of burnout and compassion fatigue. Research shows that self-compassion mindfulness interventions increase nurses' self-compassion levels and reduce their job stress. It reveals that self-compassion during the student period is effective in coping with stress and developing positive attitudes towards the profession during the nursing education process. Promoting self-compassion has the potential to improve not only individual well-being but also the quality of care provided to patients. With this review study, it is aimed to present information about the concept of self-compassion, its importance in the nursing profession, and its contributions to nurses themselves and nursing care.

Keywords: Self-compassion, nursing, care

INTRODUCTION

Self-compassion is defined as the ability to show understanding and support to oneself that one shows to others when faced with difficulties. Today, the role of self-compassion in increasing an individual's emotional well-being and psychological resilience is receiving increasing attention (Şahin Altun, Kabakçı & Olçun, 2020). Self-compassion encourages a kind, understanding and inclusive attitude towards oneself rather than a critical approach to oneself. This concept has positive effects on psychological well-being and professional performance, especially in occupational groups with high emotional burden (Yıldırım, 2019).

Nursing is a profession that requires intense efforts to support the physical, emotional and spiritual health of individuals and is carried out with dedication and empathy (Kinchin, 2021). The intense workload, emotional demands, and stress factors involved in this profession may increase the risk of nurses facing problems such as burnout, compassion fatigue, and emotional disconnection over time (Dilmaç Pınar & Ceylan, 2024). In this context, self-compassion stands out as a powerful internal resource that enables nurses to cope with the challenges they face while fulfilling their professional roles. Studies have shown that individuals with high levels of self-compassion have low stress perception and are more resilient against difficulties in business life (Dilmaç Pınar & Ceylan, 2024; Kinchen, 2021; Neff, 2023).

The importance of self-compassion in the nursing profession becomes even more evident as it prevents occupational burnout by increasing the capacity of individuals to protect

their own emotional and physical health. Self-compassion enables individuals to be kinder to themselves and less judgmental of their mistakes or failures. This attitude contributes to both increased well-being at the individual level and improved relationships with patients (Boğahan & Yaman, 2022). Promoting self-compassion has the potential to not only improve individual health but also the quality of nursing practice (Yılmaz, 2020). In recent years, studies on programs and strategies to increase nurses' self-compassion levels have attracted attention. Mindfulness-based interventions have been observed to increase nurses' self-compassion, improve their professional quality of life, and reduce work stress (Boğahan & Yaman, 2022; Yıldırım, 2019). These findings suggest that self-compassion is critical not only for individual well-being but also for professional productivity and quality of care provided to patients. In addition, research on nursing students emphasizes the effects of self-compassion on coping with stress during the learning process and developing positive attitudes towards the profession (Dilmaç Pınar & Ceylan, 2024).

Self-compassion should be considered not only as an individual characteristic but also as a skill that enhances sustainability and quality in professional health practices. This concept is a tool that enables nurses to cope with the challenges they face not only in their professional lives but also in their personal lives. Therefore, the integration of self-compassion into nursing practice should be considered as a strategic priority in terms of supporting individual and professional health (Karakaş,

Corresponding Author: Yıldız Öztürk, yldz.siyah33@gmail.com

Çelebi, Çingöl & Zengin, 2022). Accordingly, the role of self-compassion in the nursing profession is of great importance for individuals to strengthen their internal resources and cope more effectively with the difficulties they face. In this review study, it was aimed to emphasize the importance of self-compassion both individually and professionally and to address the place of this concept in nursing practice in a more comprehensive manner.

THE CONCEPT OF SELF-COMPASSION

Self-compassion is an important concept that refers to the development of a compassionate, understanding and supportive attitude towards oneself. Although this concept derives from Buddhist philosophy, today it is considered as a critical tool in psychology and health sciences to enhance individual well-being (Neff, 2003; Neff, 2023). Self-compassion involves accepting the experience as a part of being human and having a kind attitude towards oneself in this process, instead of criticizing oneself mercilessly when faced with a challenging situation. Studies pioneered by Kristin Neff (2003) suggest that self-compassion has three basic components: kindness to self, acceptance of shared human experience, and mindfulness. These components enable individuals to cope more effectively with challenging life events (Neff, 2003; Neff, 2023). It has been revealed that self-compassion increases an individual's psychological resilience, improves their ability to cope with stress and increases their general well-being (Şahin Altun, Kabakçı & Olçun, 2020). Self-compassion facilitates individuals to focus on the learning process by accepting their mistakes and encourages a constructive approach instead of a constantly critical attitude. In this respect, self-compassion is an important tool not only for individual psychological health but also for strengthening social relationships (Dilmaç Pınar & Ceylan, 2024).

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONCEPT OF SELF-CARE IN THE NURSING PROFESSION

Nursing is a discipline that requires intense emotional labor and physical effort. Nurses have to constantly use their qualities such as empathy, compassion and patience in order to provide the best care to their patients. This high emotional demand can lead to negative consequences such as burnout, compassion fatigue, and work stress (Uslu & Buldukoğlu, 2017). Self-compassion stands out as an important psychological resource for nurses to cope with such challenges. Nurses who develop a compassionate approach towards themselves can cope with the emotional burden of their profession more effectively and improve their professional life quality by protecting their own health (Dilmaç Pınar & Ceylan, 2024). Recent studies show that self-compassion reduces burnout levels of nurses and supports work-life balance (Yıldırım, 2019; Dilmaç Pınar & Ceylan, 2024). For example, mindfulness-based programs have been found to increase self-compassion levels in nurses and reduce perceived work stress. These findings reveal that self-compassion enables individuals to balance their professional and personal lives and plays a protective role against burnout (Yıldırım, 2019).

Self-compassion enables nurses to provide services more effectively in their profession. This is important not only for individual health and well-being but also for the quality of care provided to patients. Nurses with high levels of self-compassion can remain more calm and focused in stressful

situations and show more empathy and understanding towards patients. This creates a positive effect for both patients and the healthcare team (Yılmaz, 2020). When the literature is examined, different aspects of self-compassion in nurses are discussed and the importance of this concept in business life is focused on.

In a study conducted with nursing students, it was reported that self-compassion levels showed a strong relationship with psychological resilience (Dilmaç Pınar & Ceylan, 2024). This shows that self-compassion strengthens not only emotional resilience but also individuals' perception of professional competence. In another study, the effect of mindfulness-based programmes on job stress and self-compassion levels in nurses was examined and it was shown that these interventions reduced job stress and positively affected self-compassion levels by increasing the mindfulness levels of nurses (Yıldırım, 2019; Candan, 2019). In a study conducted on female nurses, the role of self-compassion between cognitive flexibility and health promotion was discussed. The study revealed that self-compassion is an important variable that supports health promotion behaviours (Erol Kaya, 2021). In a study examining postgraduate theses on compassion in nursing, it was emphasised that self-compassion is a preventive factor for burnout and compassion fatigue (Karakaş, Çelebi, Çingöl & Zengin, 2022). A study on the relationship between social media addiction and self-compassion shows that self-compassion can shape social media usage habits in nursing students (Boğahan & Yaman, 2022).

THE EFFECT OF SELF-COMPASSION ON OCCUPATIONAL QUALITY OF LIFE IN NURSES

The nursing profession is defined as a challenging occupational group that requires emotional resilience and psychological well-being. Self-compassion contributes positively to the quality of professional life by enabling individuals to develop a kind and supportive attitude towards themselves (Neff, 2003). This concept is considered as an important internal resource that improves nurses' ability to cope with professional burnout, compassion fatigue and stress (Neff, 2003). In a study conducted with health professionals, it was shown that self-compassion increases feelings of empathy and compassion along with mindfulness and enables individuals to cope more effectively with stress in their work life (Raab, 2014). Nurses in particular benefit greatly from the psychological resilience offered by self-compassion when coping with intense workload and emotional demands. This increases the quality of professional life and also improves the quality of care provided to patients (Hofmeyer et al., 2018). A study examining the effects of self-compassion on sleep quality and occupational endurance revealed that health professionals exhibited better sleep quality and higher endurance with an increase in self-compassion levels (Kemper, Mo, & Khayat, 2015). These findings emphasise the importance of self-compassion in protecting both physical and mental health of nurses.

Self-compassion is not only an individual characteristic but also a critical skill for the professional sustainability of nurses. In a study conducted among community nurses, it was stated that self-compassion reduces the risk of occupational burnout and increases the level of well-being, and self-compassion

provides a positive change in both individual and professional life (Durkin et al., 2016). In this direction, the integration of self-compassion into nursing practice is considered as a strategy that improves the quality of professional life by increasing individual resilience. In this context, it is of great importance to make programmes and trainings aimed at increasing the level of self-compassion more widespread in the health sector (Neff, 2003; Raab, 2014; Hofmeyer et al., 2018; Kemper, Mo, & Khayat, 2015; Durkin et al., 2016).

THE EFFECT OF SELF-COMPASSION CONCEPT ON NURSING CARE

Self-compassion is an important internal resource for nurses to sustain their professional roles and provide quality care to patients. While the nursing profession requires empathy, patience and intense emotional labour, neglecting one's own emotional and physical health in this process can lead to burnout (Uslu & Buldukoğlu, 2017). Studies show that nurses with high levels of self-compassion have increased job satisfaction, strengthened emotional resilience and exhibit a more empathetic approach towards patients (Şahin Altun, Kabakçı & Olçun, 2020). Encouraging self-compassion helps nurses manage work stress and allows them to carry out care processes more effectively and consciously (Yıldırım, 2019).

Studies on the effects of self-compassion on nursing care show that mindfulness-based interventions improve nurses' attitudes towards patient care by increasing their psychological resilience (Candan, 2019). Nurses with high levels of self-compassion are more sensitive and patient in their communication with their patients, while their risk of making mistakes in care processes decreases as they are more successful in stress management (Dilmaç Pınar, 2020). The ability of nurses to make more conscious and ethical decisions by adopting a patient-centred care approach is directly related to their level of self-compassion (Raab, 2014). Therefore, implementing training programmes to improve nurses' self-compassion skills is a critical step in improving professional sustainability and patient care quality (Hofmeyer et al., 2018). Finally, studies on nursing students show that the level of self-compassion is determinant in both coping with stress in the learning process and strengthening the perception of professional competence (Dilmaç Pınar & Ceylan, 2024; Erol Kaya, 2021). In addition, research on female nurses has revealed that self-compassion is an important factor supporting health promotion behaviours (Erol Kaya, 2021). It has been observed that nurses with high levels of self-compassion not only experience higher job satisfaction and reduced risk of burnout, but also are more effective and compassionate in patient care processes. Promoting self-compassion contributes to nurses to improve not only their own well-being but also patient care processes, thereby improving the overall quality of healthcare services.

Self-compassion, which is considered as one of the cornerstones of compassionate care, enables nurses to exhibit a more sensitive, patient and understanding attitude towards their patients. Studies show that nurses with high levels of self-compassion act more calmly and consciously in stressful and emotionally challenging patient care processes and are more successful in empathising with the patient (Durkin et al., 2016; Neff, 2023; Kinchen, 2021). In this context, the implementation of programmes to improve nurses' self-compassion skills is critical not only for professional

sustainability but also for improving the quality of patient care. Integration of self-compassion into nursing practice directly contributes to strengthening the relationship with patients, conducting care processes more consciously and ethically, and increasing patient satisfaction (Durkin et al., 2016; Dilmaç Pınar & Ceylan, 2024; Erol Kaya, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Self-compassion, as an important psychological resource in both individual and professional life, contributes to protecting nurses from burnout and increasing their professional resilience. Especially in the nursing profession, which requires intensive emotional labour, the development of self-compassion both increases individual well-being and improves the quality of care provided to patients. It is revealed that self-compassion-based mindfulness programmes increase nurses' self-compassion levels and strengthen their professional satisfaction and resilience against work stress. In this context, integrating self-compassion into nursing education and professional development programmes should be considered as a strategic priority for nurses to practice their profession in a sustainable manner.

ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

Referee Evaluation Process

Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Author Contributions

All of the authors declare that they have all participated in the design, execution, and analysis of the paper, and that they have approved the final version.

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